



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 23, 2022

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**CHICAGO NAMED A 2022 DIGITAL INCLUSION TRAILBLAZER, ANNOUNCES
FURTHER EXPANSION OF 'CHICAGO CONNECTED' FOR CITY COLLEGES
STUDENTS**

Chicago Connected will now offer no-cost internet to City Colleges students, expanding upon the 100,000+ pre-K-12 students currently in the program

CHICAGO — The City of Chicago was [named a 2022 Digital Inclusion Trailblazer](#) by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA). Trailblazers are judged based on six criteria showing a city or county's digital inclusion leadership. These include having full-time local government staff, crafting a digital inclusion plan, survey research, funded digital inclusion programming, and efforts to increase the affordability of home broadband service. As a result of the historic and innovative accomplishments of the "Chicago Connected" program, the city met all six criteria.

"The expansion of Chicago Connected is a data-driven solution that will help thousands of students at our City Colleges access the resources that they need to thrive and succeed," said Mayor Lightfoot. "This effort will add an additional 3,000 students to the thousands, who have received free, high-speed internet when this incredible initiative was originally launched, and put our city that much closer to closing the digital equity gap."

Chicago Connected launched in June 2020 to provide no-cost broadband access to pre-K-12 students and digital learning support to families. The program, which is a partnership between the City, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Kids First Chicago, United Way of Metro Chicago, philanthropy, and two dozen community-based organizations, collaborated to ensure students could continue to attend school when classrooms went remote due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the program's first two years, it has successfully connected 60,000+ unique households, totaling an estimated 100,000+ students connected to broadband. Chicago Connected also supports digital literacy programs through partnerships with 21 community-based organizations. As of July 2022, Chicago Connected families have completed over 28,000 learning hours.

Given the success of the program, Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and City Colleges of Chicago Chancellor Juan Salgado are excited to announce the expansion of Chicago Connected



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to up to 3,000 students enrolled in City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) over the next three years.

Participating students will receive no-cost broadband at speeds of 50/10 Mbps through either Comcast or Astound Broadband, with the opportunity to extend their service annually. Students will be eligible to continue their Chicago Connected service for up to three years with annual City Colleges enrollment or upon completion of a CCC credential, whichever happens first.

CCC also offers qualifying students an opportunity to earn a laptop through its “Learn to Own Laptop Program.” Through this program, qualifying students who borrow a laptop from CCC and remain enrolled in classes for consecutive Fall and Spring semesters will have the opportunity to keep the laptop at no cost to them.

“City Colleges is committed to removing barriers so Chicagoans can access and succeed in college,” said Juan Salgado, City Colleges of Chicago Chancellor. “Providing students in need with free internet and laptops compliment the many grants, scholarships, academic, and wellness initiatives we also offer to support students on their path to a college credential.”

The Chicago Connected expansion is part of a larger citywide effort to eliminate digital inequity. This past Spring, Mayor Lightfoot announced the launch of the Chicago Digital Equity Council, a cross-sector, community-driven effort to understand and tackle the nuanced barriers to digital equity and close Chicago’s digital divide once and for all. CCC is a member of the Digital Equity Council’s guiding team and hosted a community conversation at Kennedy-King College in Englewood. More information about the Digital Equity Council is available at [Chicago.gov/digitalequity](https://chicago.gov/digitalequity).

“We celebrate this expansion of Chicago Connected for students who would otherwise face roadblocks to the Internet and, subsequently, their dreams and goals,” said CPS Chief Education Officer Bogdana Chkoumbova. “We know that this type of access changes lives, especially for students, many of whom are CPS graduates and who are already working hard at City Colleges of Chicago. This is a common sense initiative and a win for these students and our city’s future.”

Chicago Connected is a \$50 million public-private partnership funded through a combination of support from the City, CPS, and philanthropic organizations. The program is now entering its third year in operation.

"Kids First Chicago's research and our deep engagement with Chicago families have proven time and again how powerful this program can be — for individuals to advance their learning and careers, for whole communities to close the digital divide,



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and for our city to lead the nation in digital equity and inclusion. We're proud to be part of this inspiring and growing initiative," said Daniel Anello, CEO of Kids First Chicago.

"Today, students require internet access and computers to pursue an education and employment just like they needed pencil and paper decades ago. Supporting greater access to technology for City Colleges students is one key way we are contributing to a more equitable Chicago economy," said Lara Pruitt, Bridges to Brighter Futures.

"Chicago attained the highest Digital Inclusion Trailblazers status this year, serving as a model for cities that are pursuing digital equity around the country," said Angela Siefer, National Digital Inclusion Alliance executive director.

For complete eligibility criteria and instructions to apply for the Chicago Connected expansion, City Colleges students and families can visit: ccc.edu/ChicagoConnected. Interested City Colleges students can secure their place in the Chicago Connected expansion and Learn to Own Laptop Program by completing the program applications available now on their CCC student portal (my.CCC.edu).

For questions about the expansion, please email: ChicagoConnected@CCC.edu

For more information on Chicago Connected, visit cps.edu/ChicagoConnected.

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About National Digital Inclusion Alliance: NDIA advances digital equity by supporting community programs and equipping policymakers to act. Working collaboratively with more than 800 digital inclusion practitioners, NDIA advocates for broadband access, tech devices, digital skills training, and tech support. For more information on Digital Inclusion Trailblazers, visit digitalinclusion.org/digital-inclusion-trailblazers/.